

jobs, for example, and I don't have insurance and I don't want to pursue my prior health insurance through COBRA, I can go buy one of these short-term, limited-duration health plans. It is sort of gap coverage, if you will.

Short-term, limited-duration health plans have been around for a long time. The problem is, for all practical purposes, the Affordable Care Act made them illegal. That is a bit of an overstatement. You could still purchase a short-term, limited-duration health plan but for a very short period of time, so they were rendered ineffective.

Under changes made, these plans will allow families and individuals to purchase these short-term plans for up to 12 months and in some cases, for up to 36 months. That is the result of a new rule promulgated by the Trump administration which reverses the Obama-era policies that limited these short-term plans to only 3 months with no option to renew.

Why are short-term, limited-duration health plans important? Why are they helping to contribute to our efforts to lower the cost of health insurance? Here is the problem we are trying to solve, as you well know.

These are the increases in premiums—the cost you pay—to purchase health insurance through the Affordable Care Act.

In Texas, from 2017 to 2018, the price of the silver plan—to buy a silver plan through the Affordable Care Act—went up 41.3 percent; in my State of Louisiana, 12.9 percent; in Oregon, 31.9 percent; in Wisconsin, 43.5 percent; in Pennsylvania, 30.6 percent. I could go on and on. That is why the Affordable Care Act hasn't worked. No one can afford it. I wish it had worked. It gives me no pleasure to say that. But we were told health insurance premiums would go down. They have gone up.

By making these short-term, limited-duration health plans available for a longer period of time, we are giving people the flexibility to extend them. The Trump administration, in my judgement, is making sure American families have access to a reliable, affordable health care option.

We had a vote yesterday. Some of my friends on the Democratic side of the aisle decided they wanted to end short-term, limited-duration health plans. They promulgated a proposal through the Congressional Review Act to end them. Fortunately, we defeated that effort.

What has been the effect in terms of price and availability? Well, short-term, limited-duration health plans, in many cases, are 50 to 80 percent cheaper than plans purchased under the Affordable Care Act.

You say: Why is that?

Well, there is no free lunch, and you are not going to get one now. If you purchase a short-term, limited duration health plan, it oftentimes does not have the same coverage a company is required to offer if it is a health insur-

ance company offering health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. You don't get the same coverage. That doesn't mean you get no coverage. That doesn't mean the short-term, limited-duration plan is junk insurance, because it is not. It is considered major medical insurance, and issues like lifetime limits, annual limits, coverage of preexisting conditions—there are a variety of plans out there offered. If you want to purchase a plan that is still cheaper than you could buy under ObamaCare that covers preexisting conditions, you can.

This idea that these short-term, limited-duration health plans are not insurance at all, or so-called junk insurance, is simply a bunch of nonsense. I will give an example. In the last quarter of 2016, a short-term, limited-duration health plan cost an individual about \$124 a month. That is a lot of money for a lot of Americans, but it is much better when you compare it to an unsubsidized ObamaCare plan that costs \$393 a month. You could save 70 percent by buying a short-term, limited-duration health plan.

Again, the problem was that under ObamaCare, you could only buy one of these short-term plans for 3 months. Now you can buy them for much longer.

The self-styled betters of Washington, DC, the cultured, cosmopolitan crowd up here who think they know better than everybody else in America, who think they are smarter than all Americans, would do away with short-term, limited-duration health plans if they could because they think the American people are not smart enough to understand what they are buying. We are not going to give them the choice. We are smarter than they are. They need to look to us here in Washington, DC, to run their lives.

We saw that effort yesterday on the floor of the Senate. Fortunately, we defeated it. The American people are plenty smart. They may not have time to read Aristotle every day because they are too busy earning a living, but they get it. They watched their health insurance premiums rise through the roof as a result of the Affordable Care Act, and many of them have sought out this alternative, a short-term, limited-duration plan, and said: Hey, we know it doesn't cover as much as some policies, but it is a heck of a lot cheaper, and we would like to buy it and try it for a while.

As Americans, they are entitled to do that. I am pleased that we could reserve the option for them. It was a win for American families, in my book.

We are not giving up on replacing the Affordable Care Act. Again, it gives me no joy to say we have to replace it, but it just hasn't worked. Any fairminded person who is at all objective would have to look at a plan that promised us cheaper policies and more accessibility and ended up with more expensive policies and less accessibility and say: It just didn't work. We have to replace it, and we are going to keep working on it.

In the meantime, I wanted to point out to my colleagues that we continue to chip away at the rising cost of health insurance in America.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today I rise to talk about the economy; that is, what is going on out there in terms of jobs and wage growth. It is a positive story. I have seen it firsthand back home in Ohio. Every weekend I go back to Ohio, and I meet with small business owners, and they tell me the same thing, which is that things are good. Their biggest concern is finding workers. They are growing and expanding. We see this in the national numbers as well.

These small businesses tell me it is primarily because of the tax reform and tax cuts legislation and, second, because of the regulatory environment that makes it easier for them to be able to create more jobs.

I want to start by talking about tax reform. We remember that before this legislation was passed, going back really for several years, our economy had been relatively weak. We had seen economic growth of between 1.5 and 2.5 percent, and a lot of people were saying that 2 percent growth is kind of the new normal.

In fact, the Congressional Budget Office, which is the nonpartisan group here that tells us what our growth numbers are likely to look like and then tells us what they actually are, said last year that they believed economic growth this year—the calendar year 2018—would be 2 percent. That is pretty discouraging, really. With 2 percent growth, we are not going to see the kind of growth in wages we all want to see, and we are not going to see the job expansion we all want. That 2 percent growth was before the tax legislation was passed.

They also predicted that employment would increase by an average of 107,000 jobs per month; again, that is not bad, but not something to write home about.

Now our economy is up and going, and it is moving toward its full potential.

Shortly after tax reform passed, CBO changed its estimate. They said: OK, with tax reform, this is our new estimate. We are going to say that the growth is going to be, instead of 2 percent, 3.1 percent. That is more than a 50-percent increase in growth. That is incredible. They were pretty optimistic about what would happen. They said that it was attributable to tax reform,

which was a big part of this upward revision, as they called it.

They also changed their projection on monthly unemployment. They said that instead of 107,000 jobs, we are likely to see 210,000 jobs per month.

Well, what has happened? It turns out the Congressional Budget Office, despite their optimistic projections, was wrong. We have seen numbers even better than their optimistic projections. Economic growth for the second quarter of 2018 was 4.2 percent, and a record 876,000 new businesses were created. The Federal Reserve now estimates that growth in this quarter we are in is likely to be 4.1 percent. Wow. We will see what the final numbers are, but if it is anywhere close to that, that is extraordinary.

So we have gone from 2 percent to 3 percent to 4 percent. And with 4.2 percent, 4.1 percent growth, what else is happening? Unemployment is going down. The unemployment rate was 3.7 percent last month. That is the lowest it has been since December of 1969, so it is a big deal.

The pro-growth policies that some of us have been promoting here on this side of the aisle, including tax reform and regulatory relief, have made a difference. Small business optimism is at an all-time high, according to the National Federation of Independent Businesses—NFIB. Most important to me, wages are finally going up. Over the last 10 years, it isn't just that the economy has been relatively flat, it is that wages have not increased.

In fact, if you take inflation into account, wages have been flat or even declining, on average. That is why a lot of people feel the middle-class squeeze: higher expenses, particularly healthcare costs, but also everyday costs. Healthcare costs are driving it but also housing costs, the cost of food, the cost of education.

By the same token, we had wages that were flat. That is a squeeze. So your take-home pay is not going up, but your expenses are going up. There was a lot of frustration around the country over the last several years about that.

Now we see wages going up. So 2.8 percent was the wage growth last month. That is the highest wage growth since mid-2009. So since mid-2009, which is, remember, before the recession, we have not seen wage growth like this.

This is great news. I hope we continue to see that solid wage growth because that, ultimately, is what we ought to be looking for.

Since the first of last year, I have held over a dozen small business roundtables around Ohio, where you bring small businesses in to talk about the tax reform bill regulations and other issues they care about. Every single one of the small businesses that comes to these roundtables has a story to tell about how the tax reform helped them.

These companies are passthroughs, meaning they pay taxes individually,

which is the case for the vast majority of small businesses. So they are seeing lower rates, but they are also seeing an advantage to the new laws on investment. If you invest money in your company, you can deduct it from your taxes now. You had bonus depreciation before; now you have 100 percent depreciation, and you can write things off immediately. That makes a huge difference, and it is exciting.

The Presiding Officer was talking today at lunch about being at one of the small businesses in Louisiana. It is the same story I have heard all over our States. This was a distillery, as I recall. In Ohio, our breweries and our distilleries are taking advantage of a specific part of the new tax bill that helps them on their excise taxes but also just the overall lowering of the rate, investing in their business, investing in technology, increasing the productivity of their workers as a result, which all economists say is the key to getting wages up. We are beginning to see that, and it is exciting.

This is the first year I have also visited 22 businesses directly—not a roundtable discussion as I have done with small businesses. But I go to these businesses and talk to them about how they are using this tax bill. Again, everyone has good stories to tell. Some have added more jobs; some have increased wages and gone public about that. Fifth Third Bank would be an example or the Kroger Company in my hometown of Cincinnati—big businesses.

A lot of smaller businesses have done that as well, but they have done other things too. Some have delivered bonuses, some have expanded retirement benefits, and some have bought new equipment.

For a lot of small businesses, I will talk to them and say: What are you doing with this?

They say: We are actually taking these older pieces of equipment we have, these machines, and we are upgrading them, which, again, makes workers more productive, makes the company more successful, and allows wages to go up.

One small business I visited had a machine that was roughly 31 years old. They got the machine in 1986. I thought it was an amazing coincidence that this Tax Code, which hadn't been updated since 1986, was updated, and they were using the tax savings they got from that to take a machine that was bought that same year and upgrading it, modernizing it. It was about a \$1 million investment for them, which they never could have made in a small business without the tax reform and tax cuts legislation. So it is working.

Sometimes companies are doing a combination of these various things. They might be increasing the 401(k) match and also adding more to their entry-level pay. So it is doing what was intended.

In the first quarter, we have numbers already for the amount of money that

came back to our country—over \$300 billion. Over \$300 billion came back to the United States from overseas. That is what they call repatriation, money earned overseas that companies were keeping overseas before because they had no incentive to bring it back. Now they have an incentive to bring it back. What does that mean? It means it gets invested here, sometimes in new equipment and new plants, sometimes in people's wallets and pocketbooks back here. That money is being used to help create this better economy we are talking about.

By the way, that \$300 billion, when compared to last year in the first quarter, is about 10 times more. This is because of the tax bill.

The lower tax rates for individuals mean that 90 percent of the people in America got a statement from their employer saying: Guess what. Uncle Sam is going to take less out of your paycheck. Their withholding changed. So 90 percent of workers in America have gotten something saying: You are going to have more of your hard-earned money staying in your pocket. You are going to be able to take it home, rather than have Uncle Sam take it out as part of your taxes.

As I said during the tax reform debate, when we had very spirited debates, some on the other side were saying that there was no middle-class tax relief in this legislation. I said that the proof is in the paycheck. Lower rates, doubling the standard deduction, doubling the child tax credit—those are tax cuts. They are real. Sure enough, 90 percent of Americans saw that in their paychecks. The proof is in their paycheck.

It is not really a political debate; it is a real life situation for people who are living paycheck to paycheck—most of the people I represent. So it is a big deal. For the median-income family in Ohio, that is \$2,000 a year on average. That \$2,000 a year means a vacation they otherwise couldn't take. It means investing more in their healthcare, investing more in their retirement, investing more in their kids. So it is working.

I noted earlier that wages are rising at the fastest year-over-year rate since mid-2009 and that wage growth is accelerating. Along with these lower tax rates—along with the changes we talked about in terms of doubling the standard deduction and doubling the child tax credit—people are feeling more hope and opportunity and, due in part to this lower business rate and more competitive international tax system, companies are looking to hire more.

I mentioned that what I hear back in Ohio mostly now is this: We are looking for more workers. We are willing to hire people. We need the skills.

There was a Gallup Poll taken in May, and a record number of Americans said, "Now is the time to find a quality job"—a record number of Americans because they see the help

wanted signs. In fact, the number of Americans who are employed part-time for economic reasons—who want to work full-time but can only find part-time work—is now the lowest it has been since December of 2007. So you have to go back more than 10 years to find the number of people employed part-time who want full-time work. That is the lowest it has been since December of 2007. That is good. We want people to work full-time, not part-time.

I believe we are going to continue to see this rising tide in our economy. I think there are some newer provisions in the Tax Code that are yet to be implemented that will help even more.

There is a provision in the tax bill called opportunity zones where, if you invest in some of the neighborhoods in Ohio that have had the highest, persistent, stubborn rates of poverty, then you get a tax break. That is going to help increase investment in some of the poor neighborhoods. Those opportunity zones are just getting started now, and that is going to help ensure that people who have fallen behind have a chance to catch up.

John F. Kennedy once famously said that a rising tide lifts all boats. It can. But you have to be sure that you are going into those kinds of neighborhoods and ensuring they have the opportunity to be lifted too. I think opportunity zones will help there.

Despite the strong and growing economy, there does remain a weakness in our workforce that will continue to hold us back; that is, a lot of Americans are not looking for work. They are literally on the sidelines. Labor economists call that a low labor force participation rate. It means that the percentage of people in the workforce looking for a job is relatively low.

So we have this strong economy, the lowest unemployment numbers we have had in years, going back to 1969; yet we have a lot of people in the shadows, on the sidelines, who aren't even looking for work, so they don't show up in the unemployment numbers.

If you took the labor force participation rate—again, the percentage of people in the workforce—and go back 10 years ago to just before the great recession and compare it to today, use the same labor force participation rate, what would you guess the unemployment rate would be today? It is not 3.7 percent. It is more like 8.5 percent.

As strong as this economy is, as good as things are, as optimistic as people are, the fact that wages are going up—all good things, and the tax bill is hugely responsible for that. It is helpful. It has pulled a lot of people back into work who had part-time work or were underemployed. It hasn't pulled people back into work altogether; there is still a big group of Americans, historically high numbers—probably 8 million men, as an example, between the ages of 25 and 55, able-bodied men who aren't working. That is wrong, and it is wrong for them because they are

not getting the dignity and self-respect that comes from work, helping them to be productive members of society. The numbers for women are perhaps not quite as high—but also at relatively high levels.

It is also bad for our economy. We need these workers. We want these people in the workforce.

Why has that happened? I think there are a few reasons. I think one reason is that Americans don't have the skills we would hope they would have in order to meet the job requirements of today. What do I mean by that? Today, if you don't have a technical skill—whether you are in healthcare, whether you are in manufacturing, or whether you are in one of the service industries—it is hard to find a job. So to our young people here today: Get that skills training.

If you look at the unemployment in Ohio right now—OhioMeansJobs is a website you can go on and see that there are a lot of jobs being offered online right now, yet there are a lot of people unemployed. Why is that? You see that a lot of these jobs being offered are for things like a machinist or a welder or someone with IT skills—information technology skills. Coding is an example. If you have coding skills, you can get a job in Ohio. In healthcare, there are a lot of people who are being hired who have those technical skills, including coding skills, to provide for digitized healthcare records, as an example.

If you look at the jobs that are being offered and you look at this high unemployment, you say it doesn't make sense. Part of it is because the job skills aren't there.

There is a lot of exciting stuff going on in my State and in other States where there are colleges—particularly some of our community colleges—that are working closely with some of our businesses and also with some of our high schools. High schools have career and technical education now that is expanding in Ohio. I think we are doing a good job of getting more and more young people interested in career and technical education.

Senator KAINE, on the other side of the aisle, and I started a caucus to promote CTE. We passed legislation recently to expand Federal incentives for career and technical education and to improve the standards. That is good. We are making progress, but we are not there yet. There is still a lot of skills training that should and can go on in order to provide people with the tools they need to ultimately be successful in today's economy. So that is part of it.

Part of it I think is the dependency trap. What do I mean by that? There is an issue when you are on government support, when you are dependent on government, and you want to go to work. It is both the fact that there is a cliff in terms of losing the benefits, and also there is a mountain in terms of higher taxes.

One thing that some of us have worked on here—and we need to do more—is to say: How do you work with the States to provide for that transition? If someone wants to go to work and leave a government program, how do you have some way to transition so that you don't have this big cliff and this mountain ahead of you? That creates a disincentive.

I do think there is work to be done there, but I will tell you, I think the biggest single issue in terms of these relatively high numbers of people who are out of work altogether—the people who are on the sidelines—is actually the opioid crisis and the drug issue. Why do I say that? One, I see it back home. I go around my State; I spend a lot of time talking to people at treatment centers. I talk to people who are in recovery. I talk to people who are addicted. I talk to people who are experts in providing treatment for that longer term recovery. I talk to first responders. There are a lot of people in my State; we are probably in the top five in the country in terms of the percentage of people addicted, the number of overdoses per capita, the number of deaths per capita.

In America as a whole, we lost 72,000 people last year to drug overdoses. These are historically high numbers. These are record numbers, grim statistics. More people died last year of drug overdoses than we lost in the entire Vietnam conflict. Think about that.

A lot of these people are addicted, but they aren't part of the statistics you read about—the overdoses and deaths, as tragic as they are. There is another part of the statistic, which is the people who are not productive in life because they are not engaged anymore with their friends, their family, or their work. The drugs have become everything.

I can give you a couple of statistics that I think are shocking. One is from the U.S. Department of Labor. They did a study of men between 25 and 55 who are out of the workforce, asking: How could this be—over 8 million men out of the workforce altogether—particularly with low unemployment, the opportunities out there, the jobs that are being offered? They found that almost half of those men acknowledged taking pain medication on a daily basis—on a daily basis.

What does that mean? There was another study by the Brookings Institute. Brookings said that almost half of the people they surveyed said that they were taking pain medication on a regular basis. One said the day before; one said on a daily basis.

They also asked another question: How many of you are taking prescription drugs? Two-thirds of the people acknowledged taking prescription drugs, pain medication.

These are shocking statistics. By the way, I do not believe this is overreported; I believe it is underreported. Who is going to say that they are addicted to pain medication? That is one

reason within the legal system not to do that, but there are also other reasons not to do it. A lot of people still feel it is something they can't talk about. We have changed that to a certain extent. The stigma has been removed to a certain extent. In this body, I think we have helped by talking about drug addiction as a disease, which I believe it is. You need to treat a disease as you would other diseases. It is not a moral failing; it is a disease that has to be medically treated. But there are people who are not coming forward who feel that stigma, there is no question about it. Probably 8 out of the 10 people in my State who are addicted are not getting any kind of treatment.

I think this is another issue we have to face for all the right reasons—to help these people get their lives back on track, to help these people be able to achieve what God's purpose is for them, which certainly is not to be an addict and not to be actively using and not to be causing all the pain and destruction it causes all through our society.

The No. 1 cause of crime in my State of Ohio, in pretty much every county I represent, is this issue. It is not necessarily the drug use; it is the crime that goes along with it—the property crimes, theft, fraud, and so forth—to pay for the drug habit.

If you go to the emergency room in Ohio, it is a normal issue they talk about. In our neonatal units—sad but true—more and more babies are being born with what is called neonatal abstinence syndrome, which means their moms were addicted. These kids have to be taken through withdrawal as babies, provided morphine and other drugs just to get them through withdrawal. It is incredibly sad. We don't know what the long-term impact will be on these kids, but it is a huge problem. It is the No. 1 problem I see back home in our hospitals in taking care of our babies.

If you go to our prisons, our jails, go to our courtrooms, what is the No. 1 issue? Drugs, primarily opioids. Of the 72,000 people who died of overdoses last year, the biggest single killer was not just opioids, it was fentanyl—this new synthetic opioid that has come in mostly from China, mostly through the Postal Service. It is outrageous that that continues to happen. We are taking steps to address it.

My point is, all of us are affected by this. You may not think you are, although more and more people see it directly because their friends or family or they themselves are caught up in this, but all of us are affected, including our economy.

As good as the economic numbers are, I am so glad we passed the tax reform legislation because I really think it has helped spur this economic growth, and there is opportunity for so many people. It is increasing wages. It is doing so many good things.

The next step is, as I see it, to say: OK, how do we take these people who

are not in a position to get on that first rung of the economic ladder, much less the second and third, and climb up because of their addiction—how do we get them back on track, get them to face up to their addiction and get into treatment, get them into that longer term recovery, which we know works better to get them off of their addiction and get them back into a productive life where they can reconnect not just with work but with their families, friends, their community, and their faith? The drugs become everything, as I have heard from so many addicts and recovering addicts.

The American Action Forum released a report earlier this month that found that Ohio lost about 86,000 workers and about \$72 billion in economic growth from 1999 to 2015 due to opioid addiction. This affects all of us, and it certainly affects our economy. That is the next step we must make.

In 2016, Congress started to get much more engaged in this issue. We passed two great bills, one called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE and I were the coauthors. This is broad, comprehensive legislation. Today, we were able to announce a number of grants to Ohio that are working to expand treatment to ensure that some of these gaps are filled where people get addicted, overdose, Narcan is supplied—the miracle drug that reverses the effects of that overdose—and yet they go right back into the community. We don't want that. We want to get them back into treatment. These grants will help.

We also passed legislation called the 21st Century Cures Act, which provides funding directly back to the States. CARA goes to these nonprofits and other programs that are working, evidence-based programs to help with treatment and recovery and prevention. Cures goes to the States directly and allows the States to spread out that funding where it will help. Every State is a little different and has different kinds of needs.

We started to see progress on the ground. Again, the fentanyl has come in and overwhelmed a lot of the progress I have seen. On the fentanyl side, we passed legislation just last week that finally says to our post office: You must screen these packages coming in from overseas because we know this poison is the No. 1 killer. There has been a 4,000-percent increase in fentanyl overdose deaths in my State of Ohio in the last 5 years. It is the No. 1 killer now. We know it is coming from the post office. It is coming to your P.O. box. It is coming to an abandoned warehouse from our post office. We finally said to them: You have to close this loophole because if there is a loophole, they don't have to provide law enforcement the data on these packages that they need to find the needle in the haystack, which is too hard to find without that data. Private carriers have to provide that data to

law enforcement; the post office does not. That is all going to change when the President signs this legislation next week. We are going to start to push back to keep some poison out of our communities, but we need to do much more.

The legislation we passed this week also provides more funding for treatment. It gets rid of an outdated rule that says there can be only 16 beds in a treatment center if it gets Medicaid reimbursement. That is a vestige of years past during the deinstitutionalization of folks who had mental health issues, behavioral health issues, but it doesn't work today because we want these good treatment centers that are doing a good job to be able to expand the number of beds they have for residential treatment because that is what works for some people.

Unbelievably, today they have to turn people away, even though they are there, they are ready, and they can take these people, because there is a 16-bed limit. There are too many cases. I know of people in Ohio who have told me that when they were ready—in one case, a father told me that when his daughter was finally ready to go to a treatment center, he walked her down there. They went to the treatment center. She was ready to enter. She had come to that point in her life where she realized she needed to do this. They told her there was no room—no room at the inn—because of the 16-bed limit. In the next 2 weeks, while she was waiting to get into that treatment center, you know what happened—she used again. She was addicted. She overdosed, and she died in her parents' home. That father is very happy about this legislation.

It also includes language to help with regard to these moms and kids we talked about earlier. That is important as well. It helps to ensure that there is a safe plan for these mothers who are addicted to taper off from their use of drugs so that their babies are born in a healthy state and don't have to go through what I talked about earlier, which is incredibly sad to see, tragically, where literally these babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome have to be taken through withdrawal.

It also includes the CRIB Act legislation, which is bipartisan, as were all these bills I am talking about. Senator DICK DURBIN and I have worked on the IMD exclusion—the issue with the 16 beds—for many years. We finally got it done. The CRIB Act is one that provides support for these babies we talked about because often the babies can't go back to their folks. Their parents are addicted. Where are they going to go?

There are nonprofits that have sprung up that provide help for these babies, help to get them into the right foster care, perhaps to get them with a grandparent or a great-grandparent, which is happening more and more in my State because the parents are not

capable or able to take care of these kids. The parents need to focus, one would hope, on their own treatment and recovery. Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't. The point is, the baby can't be with them, and these organizations are in a position to help. These organizations, like Brigid's Path in Dayton, OH, have volunteers who come in just to hold the babies, just to show the babies the love they need so desperately. They couldn't get reimbursement from the Federal Government. Now they can under the CRIB Act that we just passed. This will help the babies, the moms, with treatment, and keeping the poison out. It is helpful.

As we discussed this afternoon, in combination with a stronger economy that comes from the kinds of fiscal and economic policies we have pursued here, especially the tax reform and regulatory relief—that combination can lead to great things because it can provide an opportunity, if people are ready to get on that next rung of the ladder, for them to find an opportunity for themselves and their family because they have dealt with their addiction. A rising tide can lift all boats, and this growing economy gives us an opportunity to bring people out of the shadows and into a productive life of work, family, and faith.

In the midst of the opioid epidemic, we have to do more to catch those who fall through the cracks and help those who are gripped by addiction find more meaning and purpose in their lives, and we now have that opportunity. That is what is exciting about it.

I am pleased that our new opioid legislation is going to be signed into law by the President next week. I am pleased to see the progress with the economy based on the policies we have passed here, to provide people with a little more take-home pay, to be able to give companies more incentive to invest, and to level the playing field internationally for American workers who are being disadvantaged. It is coming together, and it is working. Let's combine that with an equal focus on dealing with the opioid crisis, and we will see so many other people take advantage of their American dream.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

OHIO BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, each year the Department of Education honors schools around the country that have a clear record of serving students of all backgrounds and helping all students excel.

This year, 16 Ohio schools were among 349 National Blue Ribbon Schools, honoring the hard work of students, teachers, parents, and everyone in the community who works to make these schools a success—from cafeteria workers to principals, to students, to parents, to neighbors.

These schools represent the great diversity in our State—rural and small-

town schools, urban and suburban schools, all designated as "exemplary high performing schools."

I would like to read the names of these 16 schools in Ohio: Bath Elementary School, Bluffton Elementary School, Brecksville-Broadview Heights Middle School, Central Elementary School, Hazel Harvey Elementary School, Indian Riddle Elementary School, John Foster Dulles Elementary School, Maplewood Elementary School, Mariemont Elementary School, Mother Teresa Catholic Elementary School, Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin School, Oakwood Elementary School, Saint Andrew-Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School, Stadium Drive Elementary School, and Twin Oak Elementary School.

The other school, in addition to these 16, is particularly close to my heart. It is called the Mansfield Spanish Immersion School. It sits on Euclid Avenue. It is the new school in the building where I went to elementary school, then called Brinkerhoff Elementary. It has since become a Spanish immersion school. Brinkerhoff was built, I believe, in the 1950s. I attended there and both of my brothers attended there from kindergarten through the sixth grade.

The school reopened as a public magnet school a decade ago, with a class of 11 kindergartners, under the leadership of our neighbor Jody Nash.

Over the past 10 years, under Principal Nash, and now under the current principal, Gabe Costa, the school has grown to more than 250 students across 9 grades.

Last year the school expanded to add seventh and eighth grade for the first time and had a third section of kindergartners.

Core subjects are taught in Spanish, helping Richland County students learn a second language from a young age. These students don't just excel in Spanish. The school is consistently ranked a top school in the State and has gotten high marks for serving students from diverse backgrounds.

I would add that there are not a huge number of people in Mansfield, OH, my hometown, whose parents are speaking Spanish at home. Most of these students are learning Spanish for the first time in their families.

Two years ago, the Brinkerhoff School, or the Mansfield Spanish Immersion School, was 1 of 2 schools in Ohio and 100 across the Nation to receive a National Title I Distinguished Schools Award for making progress in closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.

Awards like this mean so much to a community. They are a reminder that academic excellence isn't limited to exclusive private schools or wealthy communities on the coasts.

Too many people in this town of Washington want to refer to us as the Rust Belt—that outdated, offensive term that demeans our workers and devalues who we are. It devalues the incredible work schools like this are

doing in our State, preparing our students for the global economy of the future. These schools are not rusty. They are thriving.

Congratulations to all 16 of this year's Ohio Blue Ribbon Schools—all examples to our State and to our country and why we are so proud of them.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 4:45 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 1007, David James Porter; 1081, Ryan Nelson; 1082, Richard Sullivan; 627, William Ray; 628, Liles Clifton Burke; 629, Michael Juneau; 634, Mark Norris; 638, Eli Richardson; 894, Thomas Kleeh; 907, Jeremy Kernodle; 895, Peter Phipps; 905, Susan Brnovich; 906, Chad Kenney; 945, James Hanlon; 947, Lance Walker; further, I ask consent that the Senate vote on the nominations in the order listed, with 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to each vote; that for each nomination that is confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, that no further motions be in order, and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF DAVID PORTER

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of the nomination of David James Porter, of Pennsylvania, to be U.S. Circuit Judge for the Third Circuit.

Mr. Porter has deep roots in Pennsylvania. It is where he was born and raised by two public school educators who taught him and his siblings the value of hard work and education. Mr. Porter and his wife Valerie settled in western Pennsylvania and have raised their six children there during their 28 years of marriage.

He is widely regarded as one of the preeminent attorneys in western Pennsylvania. Mr. Porter has a wealth of legal experience that will make him an outstanding judge. Currently, he is a shareholder in the Pittsburgh office of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, a leading national law firm. During his 23 years at that firm, he has worked as a litigator on numerous complex commercial, regulatory, and constitutional